Three S.C. Boeing Workers Get Limited Role In NLRB Case

Meg Kinnard, Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Three employees who say they fear losing their jobs at Boeing Co.'s North Charleston plant were allowed on Monday to have limited roles in a federal labor dispute over the company's 787 passenger jet line.

The National Labor Relations Board has decided to allow the employees to file a brief in the case once an NLRB hearing in the case is completed, according to the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, which is helping the employees with their legal case.

In April, the NLRB filed a suit against Boeing, claiming the Chicago-based manufacturer located a new 787 passenger aircraft assembly line in South Carolina — a right-to-work state — to retaliate against Washington state union workers who went on strike in 2008. The NLRB wants that work returned to Washington, even though the company has already built a new $750 million South Carolina plant — the largest industrial investment in state history — and hired 1,000 workers there.

Boeing has said that stopping 787 work in South Carolina would be impermissibly punitive because it would effectively shut it down and would be a radical departure from legal precedent.

The company also has taken issue with the labor board's claim that the company removed or transferred any work from its Washington state facility in Puget Sound, where the aircraft is assembled by members of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers. The company says all the work in South Carolina will be new work and that no union member has lost a job over the action.

"If seems clear that many Charleston-based employees and I would lose our jobs with Boeing in South Carolina if the General Counsel's proposed remedy is adopted," Dennis Murray wrote in a declaration filed June 1. "The current unemployment rate here is high and jobs are scarce. ... Thanks to Boeing I am able to keep food on the table and a roof over my head for all of my family."

Murray, who led the effort to decertify the Machinists at the North Charleston plant, has also filed an unfair labor practice against the union. In her declaration, Cynthia Ramaker — who was the union's local president at the time of the Vought-Boeing sale — said she was frustrated by the Machinists' negative comments about the South Carolina operation. Having helped organized a Machinists local when he worked at Lockheed Martin, Meredith Going said he fears having to draw unemployment but would not want to work in a unionized environment again.

An NLRB judge in San Francisco turned down the employees' original request, which they appealed to the NLRB board in Washington.

The dispute has also captured the attention of Congress. On Friday, U.S. Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., brought his House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform to North Charleston for a hearing.

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